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## SOME NEW VOLUMES OF VERSE.

BY W. D. HOWELLS.

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NEXT to Mr. Thomas Hardy's novels I have liked his lyrics;\* but I hasten to say that my preference must not be interpreted to the disadvantage of his dramas, for I have not yet read his "Dynasts." Probably, as I am so apt to like everything he does, I shall like his dramatic pieces as much as his lyrical. Yet I promise nothing, and I would be no true critic if I did not make my reservations concerning even his lyrics. I do not like them all, and those that I like I like partly rather than wholly. Of course, one might say the same of Shakespeare's or Milton's things, or even one's own imperfecter endeavors; but I find it a peculiar hardship in a writer whom I had not expected any poetry at all of, and have then got more than I expected: I feel that he owed me an unalloyed recompense when my experience had bettered my expectation. This sort of disappointment attended me in the "Wessex Poems," and in the "Poems of the Past and Present," and it has followed well through "Time's Laughing-Stocks." But there is every now and then a piece of Mr. Hardy's, with a line, a stanza, or perhaps only a phrase in it, so captivating that I yield to it a heart used to giving itself with something like the passion of first love and gladly let the sweetness qualify the whole piece for me. Such a stanza is that parenthesized description of the bride, as if the like richness could be carelessly thrown in any time, in "The Satin Shoes":

" (She was as fair as early day  
Shining in meads unmown,  
And her sweet syllables seemed to play  
Like flute-notes softly blown.)"

Never have I known anything more tenderly, more endearingly

\* "Time's Laughing-Stocks and Other Verses." By Thomas Hardy.  
New York: Macmillan & Co.

said or fuller of the sense of youth, of girlhood and of a personality delicately embodying both; and I made haste to get "Time's Laughing-Stocks," that I might find all the other pieces like that. But I did not find even that; it was of a still later singing; and this, perhaps, impoverished me among the pieces I did find. Yet if it had not been for the loveliness of those lines, I might have felt a greater beauty than I owned in the beauty really there.

It is mostly a tragical beauty, a sort of wild-flower pathos, a wayside-wood passion, which is the nature of the book, with a grimness, an obstructiveness as of stony fields and perdurable monoliths in the over-psychologized passages. "A Tramp-Woman's Tragedy," "A Sunday Morning Tragedy," "The Curate's Kindness," "Julie Jane," "The Husband's View," and "A Dream Question" will give the reader a notion of what I mean, though he will do well to read the rest of the poems while he is about it. He will find compacted, or ejaculated in the difficult pieces, that rich earthiness, that heathenness, that mortalness, that godlessness which one is aware of in Mr. Hardy's fiction, or thinks one ought to be aware of, since it has been so much noted. I am rather ashamed to note it again; but what can one do? It seems rather awfuller, nakeder, starker in the verse than in the prose, where it is softened and veiled by the play of the poet's humor. Poet he is, and always was, with more affection for his mother Earth than his father God whom he seems not to understand very well and apparently accuses of ignoring if not neglecting His children, and of not being a very high intelligence or at least a deep consciousness.

#### "NEW-YEAR'S EVE.

"'I have finished another year,' said God,  
     'In gray, green, white and brown;  
 I have strewn the leaf upon the sod.  
 Sealed up the worm within the clod,  
     And let the last sun down.'

"'And what's the good of it?' I said.  
     'What reasons made you call  
 From formless void this earth we tread;  
 When nine-and-ninety can be read  
     Why nought should be at all?

“‘Yea, Sire; why shaped you us, who in  
 This tabernacle groan—  
 If ever joy be found therein,  
 Such joy no man has wished to win  
 If he had never known!’

“Then he, ‘My labors—logicless—  
 You may explain, not I:  
 Sense-sealed I have wrought without a guess  
 That I evolved a Consciousness  
 To ask for reasons why.

“‘Strange that ephemeral creatures who  
 By my own ordering are,  
 Should see the shortness of my view,  
 Use ethic tests I never knew,  
 Or made provision for!’

“He sank to raptness as of yore,  
 And opening New-Year’s Day,  
 Wove it by rote as theretofore,  
 And went on working evermore  
 In his unweeting way.”

This is the Poet’s case against the Creator, and it seems a strong one; few creatures but it shall bring a thrill of bitter self-satisfaction; but perhaps if it were the Creator really speaking, and not the Poet dramatically for Him, He might have something different to say. Between personages so high, however, the critic may not venture to interpose, and the reader will probably do best to pass in silence.

But is this somewhat a mood of all the actual poetry? I have fancied perhaps it is, but I will not positively say that I find confirmation of my conjecture in the two books of lyrics by Mr. Rice,\* which as in Mr. Hardy’s case I have been reading to the exclusion of his dramas. It is an English deity that Mr. Hardy mocks, and it is English emotions and experiences, ground-English, which his satire reflects; but the fanes that Mr. Rice flouts are far-Japanese, Chinese, Hindu, Moslem, Egyptian. The gods there no more answer back than the English deity; now, since all the gods have grown so subjective, they no longer retort in plagues, or comets, or earthquakes, or in fire from heaven, that they were once so ready with; it appears they can-

\* I. “Many Gods.” II. “Nirvana Days.” By Cale Young Rice. New York: Doubleday & Page.

not; or else they will not because they have found that such arguments do not meet the human logic. As for our own Hebrew-derived, English, Anglo-Saxon deity, who is so far from meeting the English poet's requirements, the American poet starts on his round of the Oriental faiths with a consoling trust in Him that I must transfer to the reader so far as he will accept it.

"ALL'S WELL.

- "The illimitable leaping of the sea  
 The mouthing of his madness to the moon,  
 The seething of his endless sorcery,  
 His prophecy no power can attune,  
 Swept over me as on the sounding prow  
 Of a great ship that steered into the stars,  
 I stood and felt the awe upon my brow  
 Of death and destiny and all that mars.
- "The wind that blew from Cassiopeia east  
 Wanly upon my ear a rune that rung;  
 The sailor in his eyrie on the mast  
 Sang an 'All's well' that to the spirit clung.  
 . . . . .  
 'And is all well, O Thou Unweariable  
 Launcher of worlds upon bewildered space,'  
 Rose in me, 'All? or did thy hand grow dull  
 Building this world that bears a piteous race?  
 O was it launched too soon or launched too late?  
 Or can it be a derelict that drifts  
 Beyond thy ken toward some reef of Fate  
 On which Oblivion's sand forever shifts?'
- "The sea grew softer as I questioned—calm  
 With mystery that like an answer moved,  
 And from infinity there fell a balm,  
 The old peace that God is, tho' all unproved,  
 The old faith that tho' gulfs sidereal stun  
 The soul, and drown within their deep,  
 There is no world that wanders; no, not one  
 Of all the millions, that He does not keep."

Mr. Rice seems more naturally a singer than Mr. Hardy, and whatever I might say of his theology I could have but little praise for his poetry. There is some bold languaging which I could wish a little more timorous, though perhaps the themes may imperatively require it; but the poems are flashingly, glowingly full of the East as I understand the East, though really

I may no more understand it than I understand Greek when I say that certain modern poetry is very Greek; one trusts to one's ignorance in these things and to what people say who ought to know. But what I am sure of in Mr. Rice is that here we have an American poet whom we may claim ours, however Japanese, Chinese, Hindu, Moslem, Egyptian he may be in his inspirations and divinations. There is abundance of mysticism, which is almost never mysticism, in his page, but I believe I like best of all that ribald burst of human nature in "A Song of the Sects" from the lips of an Armenian, a Latin, a Coptic and a Greek Christian in a tavern at Jerusalem. Its savagery, to be sure imparts no sense of the beauty one feels in most other pieces in the book. But one realizes here as there that it is a fresh voice one hears so far from home swelling our native chorus, and it is again a Kentucky voice, as clearly of the Kentucky earth and sky as Mr. Cawein's, long so surpassingly rich and fine. The later singer is not so sensuous as the earlier, and from what I have been intimating he is over-psychological in his themes. The one brings Keats's Hellas to Kentucky; the other carries Kentucky to all the Orient. But when he finds his dreaming and divining fancy recalled by some strong local occasion, he comes down to business with a strenuousness which I do not remember to have found in Mr. Cawein's muse, though quite likely I have forgotten. I mean that such pieces as "Night Riders" and "Honor to the Night Riders who murdered Hedges," coming at the close of "Nirvana Days," give one a grateful sense of indignantly duteous force which is refreshing after those excursions in reveries. One perceives that it was for a special reason that this poet was born in Kentucky and not in the sunrise lands that have so winningly invited his naturalization.

It is in like manner to our pleasure and profit that an English poet domesticated among us turns so often, with "heart untravelled" to his own country, in Mr. Le Gallienne's "New Poems."\* Though the themes are apparently impatriate, it is England that suffers and revolts and renounces in such magnificent humanities (if I may wrench the word from a conventional to a real use) as "The Cry of the Little Peoples," and

\* "New Poems." By Richard Le Gallienne. New York: John Lane Company.

"Christmas in War-Time," and "The Illusion of War." It is her conscience, it is her grief, that speaks in the first and the second, and it is her outraged common sense and true heart uttering themselves in the last, which I am going to repeat here for the good of the reader's soul, for we Americans, too, are apt to be smitten with the beauty of the same glorious devil.

"War  
I abhor,  
And yet how sweet  
The sound along the marching street  
Of drum and fife; and I forget  
Wet eyes of widows, and forget  
Broken old mothers, and the whole  
Dark butchery without a soul.

"Without a soul—save this bright drink  
Of heady music, sweet as hell;  
And even my peace-abiding feet  
Go marching with the marching street,  
For yonder goes the fife,  
And what care I for human life!  
The tears fill my astonished eyes  
And my full heart is like to break,  
And yet 'tis all embannered lies,  
A dream those little drummers make.

"Oh, it is wickedness to clothe  
Yon hideous, grinning thing that stalks  
Hidden in music, like a queen  
That in a garden of glory walks,  
Till good men love the thing they loathe.  
Art, thou hast many infamies,  
But not an infamy like this.  
Oh, snap the fife and still the drum,  
And show the monster as she is."

Whoever reads this cannot question the power of a poet who mostly makes you feel his delicacy. Occasionally his delicacy goes a little too far for me and ends in a tenuity impalpable to what I am willing to call my thumb-fingeredness. Yet when it goes farthest and my week-day understanding cannot pursue it to its ultimate meaning, there is somewhere in me a Sabbath sense which divines a significance which the merely corporeal words have not borne—as in these lines:

"Oh, climb with me, this April night,  
The silver ladder of the moon—  
All dew and danger and delight;  
Above the poplars soon,

"Into the lilac-scented night sky,  
Shall mount her maiden horn,  
Frail as a spirit to the eye—  
Oh, climb with me till morn."

Something of William Blake, something of Emily Dickinson, (who was the New England palingenesis of William Blake) is here, and the like impalpable loveliness is in many passages of this mostly beautiful book. But it has a music very distinctly its own, with a haunting charm in its dying falls, and a delight in its gladder tones which I do not remember to have got from other poets. For lightness and fineness of what must be called critical analysis of his own joy, it seems to me that this poet is at his subtlest in "The Nightjar," which he holds dearer than the nightingale—

"The soul of Tennyson become a bird,"

the Greece that Leighton painted, "the moulded notes of Mendelssohn," the "marble make-believe" of Canova; but not comparable to the—

"Browning among the birds, the nightjar, he."

It is all very literary, and Mr. Le Gallienne is very literary, and I like him for being so, for without being so he could not turn and give so fresh and straight a drink of nature in his apostrophe to his chosen bird.

"Coarse beak of blunted music, uncouth bird  
That grinds monotonous music through the night,  
Trusting that truth shall make amends for art;  
Thy voice is as the voice the future loves;  
Face poor in feature, rich in flaming soul;  
Rude bird, a shire of pine woods in thy voice,  
Fern-throated, thistle-tongued and moorland bred."

It will not do to say that Keats himself could not have worded this better, for Keats is dead and there is no way of proving such a thesis; but with Keats no longer alive I take leave to be glad of the surpassing felicity of phrasing, the impassioned sense of beauty, the exquisite fancy and not least the just and manful spirit which I find in Mr. Le Gallienne's poetry.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.